

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SOE-02 AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00
COME-00 DODE-00 EB-08 DOE-15 H-01 INR-10 INT-05
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 OMB-01 PM-05 ICA-11 OES-09
SP-02 SS-15 STR-07 TRSE-00 ACDA-12 PA-01 NRC-05
SES-02 /148 W

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R 041216Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3207
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL MADRAS
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 11907

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MNUC, IN
SUBJECT: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE NUCLEAR
POLICY DEBATE WITHIN INDIA

REF: (A) NEW DELHI 11700; (B) NEW DELHI 11697; (C) NEW DELHI
11462

1. THE ATTACKS ON PRIME MINISTER DESAI'S NUCLEAR POLICY IN BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT (REFTELS) ONCE AGAIN DEMONSTRATE THAT THE NUCLEAR POLICY IS A POLITICAL ISSUE WHICH CUTS ACROSS PARTY LINES AND ENGAGES NATIONAL PRESTIGE PERHAPS MORE THAN ANY OTHER ISSUE IN THE COUNTRY. ALTHOUGH THE HARSHTEST CRITICISM NOT UNEXPECTEDLY CAME FROM THE OPPOSITION, THE LOK SABHA DEBATE WAS INITIATED BY A JANATA (ALBEIT GADFLY) MP WHO, WE SUSPECT, REFLECTS THE VIEW OF MANY OF HIS FELLOW PARTYMEN ON
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THE NECESSITY FOR NUCLEAR RESEARCH AND APPLICATION TO THE FUTURE OF INDIA'S DEVELOPMENT. THE PRIME MINISTER'S UNILATERAL ESCHEWAL OF NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES IS, SIMPLY, NOT A POPULAR ONE IN INDIA.

2. THE ARGUMENT THAT INDIA MUST NOT MISS OUT ON THE TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION AS IT HAD ON THE INDUSTRIAL ONE, HAS STRONG

APPEAL. IT AROUSES NATIONALISTIC SENTIMENT FOR SELF RELIANCE, FEEDS ON PRIDE IN INDIA'S SCIENTIFIC ESTABLISHMENT, AND DRAWS UPON ALL THE ARGUMENTS OF DISCRIMINATION AND EXPLOITATION WHICH UNDERLIE OTHER DEVELOPED/DEVELOPING COUNTRY ISSUES. THE NUCLEAR STATES, IN PARTICULAR THE UNITED STATES, ARE VIEWED AS SEEKING TO MONOPOLIZE NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY AND TO DEPRIVE INDIA OF THE FULL BENEFITS OF NUCLEAR ENERGY FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES. EVEN MPS SYMPATHETIC TO THE PRIME MINISTER THUS SOMETIMES DO NOT TAKE AT FACE VALUE HIS ASSERTIONS THAT HE HAS BANNED NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS OUT OF CONVICTION. INSTEAD, THEY SUGGEST THAT HIS DECISION, IF NOT A RESULT OF US AND SOVIET PRESSURE, WAS, AT THE LEAST, ADOPTED IN RECOGNITION OF INDIA'S HELPLESS DEPENDENCE ON NUCLEAR MATERIAL IMPORTS. THEY FURTHER CRITICIZE HIM FOR HAVING GIVEN AWAY THIS, HIS ONLY CHIP, EARLY IN THE GAME OF NEGOTIATING WITH THE NUCLEAR POWERS AND OF GETTING NOTHING IN RETURN.

3. IN THIS RESPECT, THE PRIME MINISTER'S CRITICISM OF THE POKHARAN EXPLOSION OF 1974 WAS PROBABLY NOT POLITICALLY ADEPT. HE FAULTED IT ON TWO COUNTS: (A) IT HAS CAUSED TROUBLE IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH NUCLEAR SUPPLIERS, AND (B) HAS ADDED NOTHING TO INDIA'S SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE. ON THE FIRST COUNT, THIS LEAVES THE PRIME MINISTER OPEN TO CHARGES THAT HE IS OVERLY CONCERNED WITH AND DEPENDENT ON THE REACTIONS OF THE SUPER POWERS AND THEREFORE IS HIMSELF MAKING A POLITICAL ISSUE OF POKHARAN. ON THE SECOND COUNT, IN HIS BALD ASSESSMENT OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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VALUELESSNESS OF THE POKHARAN TEST, HE OFFENDS HIS CRITICS BY SEEMING TO DENIGRATE THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF INDIA'S SCIENTISTS. HIS UNFORTUNATE MUDDLE AND SUBSEQUENT FAILURE TO CLARIFY HIS DISTINCTION BETWEEN BLASTS AND EXPLOSIONS ADDS FURTHER TO THE ACCUSATIONS THAT HE DOES NOT UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF AND NEED FOR NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES AND TO THE DEMANDS THAT THERE BE A FULL SCIENTIFIC REVIEW OF HIS POLICY. THE PRIME MINISTER'S REMARKS THAT IF NECESSARY INDIA CAN GO IT ALONE IN NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENT OVER THE LONG TERM GET LOST IN THE CONTROVERSY GENERATED BY HIS STAND THAT HE WILL NOT DEBATE POLICY IN PUBLIC WITH SCIENTISTS WHO ARE THEMSELVES DIVIDED ON THE ISSUE AND THAT HE ALONE HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAKING THE FINAL DECISIONS.

3. FOR A MAN WHO HIMSELF ESPOUSES SO STRONGLY THE INDEPENDENCE AND SELF RELIANCE OF INDIA, THIS IS HARD CRITICISM TO TAKE. IN RESPONSE, THE PRIME MINISTER HAS APPEALED TO HIS CRITICS TO SEE HIS POLICY NOT ONLY IN SCIENTIFIC AND NATIONALISTIC TERMS BUT ALSO IN THE LARGER HUMANITARIAN AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF CONTROLLING THE INHERENTLY DESTRUCTIVE POWERS OF NUCLEAR ENERGY. HE HAS ASKED THEM TO SEE HIS UNILATERAL BAN ON NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES AS A GOAL TOWARD

WHICH THE WHOLE WORLD IS MOVING. TO VINDICATE HIS POLICY AND TO STRESS THAT THE ISSUE IS AN INTERNATIONAL ONE WHICH ULTIMATELY MUST BE RESOLVED BY NEGOTIATIONS AMONG ALL THE NATIONS, THE PRIME MINISTER CITES THE DECLARATION OF THE SSOD AND THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR A CTB. SO FAR, HIS CRITICS HAVE NOT RESPONDED TO HIS APPEALS.

4. AS THE PRIME MINISTER SEARCHES FOR WAYS WHICH MAY PERMIT ACCOMODATION BETWEEN OUR VIEWS ON SAFEGUARDS AND HIS, HE MAKES HIMSELF INCREASINGLY VULNERABLE TO HIS DOMESTIC CRITICS. WE DO NOT SEE THE PRIME MINISTER SUCCUMBING TO THESE CIRITICS. HE HAS TAKEN WHAT HE SEES TO BE A PRINCIPLED POSITION ON NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS, AND HE IS A STUBBORN AND COURAGEOUS MAN. HE WILL, HOWEVER, BE INCREASINGLY BELEAGURED UNLESS HIS BASIC-
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ALLY UNPOPULAR POSITION IS BUTTRESSED BY REAL PROGRESS INTERNATIONALLY ON A COMPREHENSIVE TEST BAN AND ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS LIMITATIONS.
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